

For Immediate Release
October 28, 2005

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Robert C. Booker Appointed as New Executive Director of Arizona Commission on the Arts

PHOENIX, Ariz.: Today Virginia Cárdenas, Chair of the Arizona Commission on the Arts (ACA), announced the appointment of Robert C. Booker to lead the Commission as its new executive director. Booker will join the Commission on January 2, 2006, having served for eight years as Executive Director of the Minnesota State Arts Board. Acknowledging the unanimous recommendation of Commission members, Cárdenas said, "Robert Booker is a proven arts leader. He has always worked tirelessly to ensure that the arts have a place in daily life. We are delighted he's decided to join us and continue doing so here in Arizona."

As the state arts agency, the Commission works toward ensuring that everyone in Arizona has the opportunity to participate in the arts. "Robert Booker has a terrific skill set, and a record of creating partnerships between arts and other sectors. I look forward to working with him," said Governor Janet Napolitano. "Arizona is poised as a prime destination for businesses, and families and visitors that are looking for vibrant, active, distinctive communities. I look to the Arts Commission to continue and further its efforts in connecting the arts, business, government and individuals."

Booker's appointment concludes a national search process. "The search committee and the Commission were impressed with the quality of the candidates that were attracted to this position," Cárdenas reflected. "The Arizona Commission on the Arts has a national reputation as a leading state arts agency – one that is innovative, is transparent and is very engaged in communities throughout the state. Our search process was very deliberative, and in the end Bob's leadership qualities, proven ability to bring diverse partners together, and his passion for Arizona and its arts made him the clear choice."

"Arizona is a national leader in respecting its cultural traditions, creating new opportunities for the arts in communities, and supporting the creative economy and cultural tourism," Booker said. "It is a true honor to be selected to head the Arizona Commission on the Arts. The board and staff are first rate and I am anxious to meet the artists, educators, and arts leaders throughout the state."

Among the hallmarks of Booker's tenure at the MSAB is his commitment to partnerships that expand visibility and resources for the arts. He helped create a partnership that engages the Arts Board, Explore Minnesota Tourism, Minnesota Historical Society, and the Minnesota Departments of Natural Resources and Transportation in activities that promote cultural and heritage tourism in Minnesota. Booker also has been a tireless advocate for arts education and, throughout his term in Minnesota, worked to further develop the board's arts-in-education programs.

Booker began working at the Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB) in October 1985. For five years, he administered the agency's Operating Support, Series Presenters, and Touring Arts programs. He served as the agency's assistant director from 1990 to 1997; and was named executive director in 1997. Reflecting on Booker's leadership, MSAB Chair Matt Anderson said, "Look at the Minnesota State Arts Board today and you're bound to see the impact Bob has made in one way or another on virtually every aspect of what we do. And, his efforts have not been confined by state lines—there are few people in the country who have invested as much time and effort in furthering the cause of state arts agencies nationwide."

Booker has also been a long-time leader on the national arts scene. He has served as a member of the Washington, D.C.-based National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) board for seven years and just recently completed his two-year term as president of the board. NASAA Executive Director Jonathan Katz said of the appointment, "Bob Booker is recognized as one of the most able cultural leaders in the United States. His colleagues elected him president of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA). At NASAA, his strategic leadership strengthened our partnerships and helped us adapt effectively to a changing environment. He demonstrated insight, energy and a commitment to public service in Minnesota that served that state arts agency well. Congratulations to the Arizona Commission on the Arts and the people of Arizona."

In 2001, both the Arizona Commission on the Arts and the Minnesota State Arts Board were selected as one of thirteen states to participate in a five-year, nationwide initiative funded by the Wallace Foundation to allow state arts agencies to research, train, test, and share best practices for increasing arts participation. Booker is eager to continue ACA's mission to provide arts opportunities to all Arizonans. "I am so passionate about fostering and helping others discover the transformative power of the arts in our lives, our communities, and our society. Arizona has a long tradition of being a center for the arts and creative activity. From the extraordinary work created by Arizona's first people to the art forms brought as Americans moved west, to the traditions of our newest residents. I know there are wonderful examples of the creative arts, both professional and amateur in every corner of the state, and I am excited about seeing them firsthand when I start in January and begin my statewide work."

Booker succeeds Shelley Cohn, who retired earlier this month after 20 years as ACA Executive Director. The Commission has 18 staff members and a current annual budget of \$4.4 million. As the state arts agency, the Commission envisions an Arizona where all people can broaden, deepen and diversify their engagement with the arts,
as creators, audiences and supporters,
in ways that are satisfying and integral to their lives.

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